

# GERRY'S LITTLE

# TERRAS

The puppet master who created *Thunderbirds*, *Joe 90* and *Stingray*, is back with *Terrahawks*, a new space fantasy for kids of all ages. Jo Baker takes a sneak preview. . . .

**R**emember *Thunderbirds*? Of course you do. Parker, Lady Penelope, Scott, Tracey Brains *et al* filled the fantasies, dreams and after-school hours of a whole generation of children (and their parents). Now, Gerry Anderson, the maestro behind the series, and creator also of *Captain Scarlet*, *Joe 90*, and *Stingray*, is back on the scene with a new puppet epic; *Terrahawks*.

"This is not just the start of a new series," comments Anderson, "but the birth of an industry". He could be right. If *Terrahawks* grips the popular imagination in the same way that *Thunderbirds* did, we could soon find ourselves with the British-produced equivalent of *E.T.* As well as a twenty-six part T.V. serial, Precision Video are releasing six *Terrahawks* tapes in late September (before the T.V. serial) each with a two-to-three hour programme. In addition, Japan's largest toy manufacturer is producing twenty-six *Terrahawk* toys, a video game is in production, and, on the publishing side, an annual and two books are in preparation!

But will it catch on, and is the old Anderson magic still there? My answer is yes on both counts. The other day I visited Anderson at Bray Studios near Maidenhead where work is busily in progress on *Terrahawks*, and was treated to a screening of Episode One in the series.



*Jerry Anderson with Zelda, chief baddie in his new puppet empire*



*Katie — glamorous pilot-cum-soul singer*

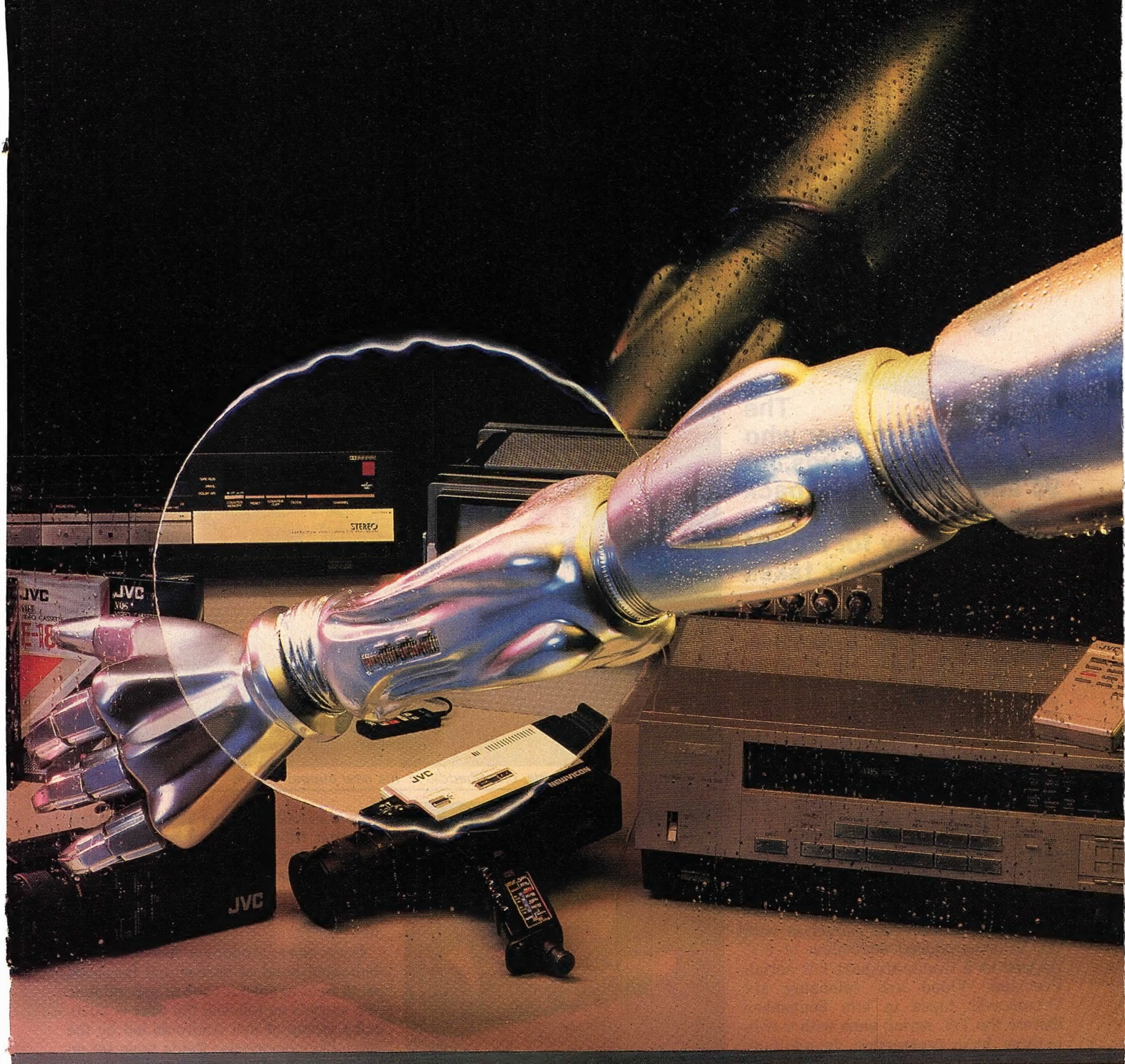
This was called *Expect The Unexpected*, an ironic title since I got entirely what I was expecting; another witty and inventive puppet series with enough action and thrills to appeal to kids and enough tongue-in-cheek humour to appeal to adults.

Once more, Anderson has created a dedicated band of heroes and heroines, set to fight against a gang of evil villains. The story is as follows: the year is 2020, and a group of evil Androids led by the witch-like commander Zelda have set up shop on Planet Mars, where they are laying plans for, you guessed it, the invasion of Earth and the destruction of the human race. On Earth, the U.N. High Command knows that there is One Man who can act decisively in times like this: Dr. 'Tiger' Ninestein, a distinguished military man who is given the task of setting up an elite fighting force to defend the world.

This force is called the *Terrahawks*. From their secret base somewhere in



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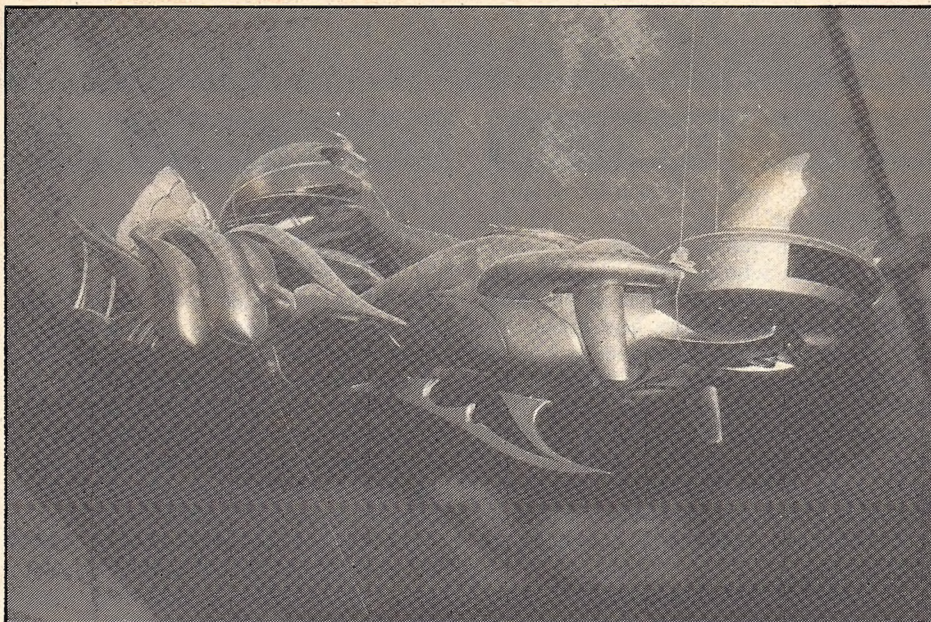
All in all, it's really not surprising JVC is admired from afar. And is now quite irresistible to certain people.

Are they trying to tell us something?



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A magnificent 'Space Samurai' ship due to appear in later episodes of Terrahawks

South America they develop sophisticated weaponry and prepare for battles to come. The Terrahawks team comprises: Dr. Ninestein, who it turns out is a clone!; Captain Mary Falconer, a smooth 'lady exec' type; Captain Kate Kestrel (is Women's Lib having an influence, we ask?), a pilot who doubles as a glamorous Diana Ross-style soul singer in her spare time; Lieutenants Hawkeye and Hiro, two likeable figures similar to Scott and Tracy of yore, one American and one Japanese.

And then there are the Zeroids, a typically brilliant Anderson invention, these are small circular silver balls which talk and have characters of their own. The chief Zeroid is Sergeant Major Zero whose speech is done by none other than Windsor "It Ain't 'alf 'ot Mum" Davis, and after him comes Space Sergeant 101 who sounds a bit like Kenny Everett! These two amiable robots (reminiscent of R2D2 and C-3PO in *Star Wars*) command a troupe of Zeroids who are the 'cannon fodder' of this high tech toy world.

But best of all in Anderson's troupe of new characters is the chief baddie, Zelda. A grotesquely ugly creation, but full of character she is guaranteed to give kids nightmares and adults fuel for mother-in-law jokes. Using a female rather than male figure as the ultimate threat to life is a very clever move by Anderson. The cruel mother-figure has always been more complex and frightening than the male (if you don't believe me, just look at Hitchcock's films where she is nearly always evoked), and, dare I say it, she has even more potency today with the nation being ruled over by a woman!

"The Terrahawks series is more sophisticated than *Thunderbirds*," says Anderson, "I don't believe in children's entertainment as such". There is no doubt that with Terrahawks he is trying to capture the more general family market that *Thunderbirds*, more than any of his other series, captured. There are

more humorous, sexual, religious and political undertones than ever before. For instance, an expression one character uses is "For Space's Sake!" rather than for Heaven's or God's and we are led to believe that religion as we know it has died out by 2020; similarly, when attractive puppet Katie has climactically blasted an enemy to pieces she purrs, "That was the most exciting moment in my life" evoking titters from the adult audience.

So much for the adults, though, what about the kids? "I was very interested to see whether modern children would respond to puppets", said Anderson, wary of a generation bred on the hype and instant satisfaction of the video game. He decided that what he needed was "a crisper approach", which involved a technique different from *Thunderbirds*, more versatile and faster. Anderson came up with Supermacromation. Whats that? "Oh, it's gobbledegook," he said, "I made it up, but basically it means that now we're using hands and other means to work the puppets rather than strings."

*Thunderbirds* was a strings series (the strings were specially coated with an aerosol spray to make them invisible to the camera), but the Terrahawks characters are worked from below by hand, or a number of hands working various facial and bodily functions, and their eye movements are controlled by infra-red remote (just like a video recorder). These more sophisticated techniques mean that the Terrahawks team are more mobile and 'human' than their *Thunderbird* ancestors, though even now, the Chief Puppeteer was telling me, they have a devil of a job getting the things to smile (one of the most complex facial gestures involving the eyes, nose, cheeks, as well as the mouth, so that if you simply make the mouth smile it tends to look menacing rather than friendly!)

Not only have the 'cast' been carefully wrought, however, but the production

standards at Bray where the series is being shot are also of the highest order. "Photographically, Terrahawks should be superb," Anderson assured me, "It has all been shot on 16 mm and transferred to video using a camera specially built for the series." Bray Studios themselves were a hive of activity; here they were shooting a scene which involved one person dropping a few silver balls in front of a camera (this will later emerge as a team of Zeroids cascading in slow-motion down rough terrain); there they were shooting another involving Katie the soul singer at her piano, a two-foot high doll who quivered as the people working her various parts took their places in the 'pit' beneath her, and her 'eyes' controller hovered at the edges with the remote control; elsewhere, in the workshop, they were busy sticking the insides of cassette boxes, odd bits of plastic and anything that came to hand in intricate and loving detail on the various pieces of wondrous space hardware which make up the Terrahawks' craft.

It certainly is an industry. Anderson hopes that, like *Thunderbirds*, Terrahawks will be enormously successful on a worldwide basis. "As I've grown older," he says, "I've come to realise that puppet shows have a longer life than live-action films" (he is returning to puppets after a rather unsuccessful stint as a live-action director) "They don't go out of date, and the stars need never grow old".



A selection of vehicles in the Bray workshop

Now, this 54-year old wizard, who has been in the screen puppet business for 23 years, when his *Four Feather Falls* appeared in 1960, looks set for another worldwide success. "We will probably go straight on with the next 26 TV episodes," he said, "There will be a massive merchandising campaign with promotion in every toy shop. We aim to have Terrahawks showing in the States by Autumn 1984, and Precision Video have world rights (excluding Japan)."

Does Anderson think that Terrahawks will be a success? "It will be a success because we will make it a success," he states, "If it follows in *Thunderbirds* footsteps it will be variously dubbed and interpreted for showing throughout the world.

Can anyone save the Earth from this series? Does anyone want to? Judging by the excited enjoyment of the first episode and the avowals to catch it when it comes out that I encountered at the preview, decidedly not. Terrahawks, we have lift off!



# NEW RELEASES

## Psychomania — The Living Dead

1hr 30mins

Distributed by VCL on VHS and Beta

An enjoyable minor horror movie from 1972, this concerns a gang of restrained and typically British Hell's Angel types who return from the grave as indestructible menaces to society. Led by the cheerfully insolent Nicky Henson they get up to such devilish pursuits as "doing the ton", and zoom round supermarket precincts playing havoc with innocent shoppers and raising the temper of flat-footed police inspector Robert Hardy. But nothing can harm them because Henson has made a pact with the devil, committed suicide and come back again — "you can only die once", he explains to the rest of the gang.

This ludicrous premise is handled in such a deft and amusing fashion that it's easy to forgive the film its faults. Particularly funny are the scenes in which the other gang members join their leader by also committing suicide: one of them is at the top of a block of high rise flats when a passing police constable calls up to him to move his bike, which is causing an obstruction. "Be right down," he yells

— and jumps! And another is seen merrily whistling on his way to the river, with a heavy chain tied to his legs.

Don Sharp, who directed the film has quite a reputation for turning out neat little low-budget chillers and gives this one a nice tongue-in-cheek feel as well as working up a fair bit of excitement in the action scenes showing the motorcycle gang being chased by the police. There is also a fair selection of chills in the early part of the film where Henson is forced to undergo a frightening ordeal in a locked room to discover the secret of immortality.

The notable cast all perform well, particularly George Sanders in one of his last screen appearances as a sinister manservant in the Henson household, and Beryl Reid as Henson's witchcraft-dabbling mother. And compared to the low-quality gore pics that dominate the horror market nowadays, the film is extremely restrained in its use of violence. Modern audiences may find it amusing to see a gang of so-called Hell's Angels who sit around singing folk songs and use absolutely no bad language, but it's all great fun and could even give horror movies a good name. — Allan Bryce.



Hells Angels that come back from the dead in Psychomania

## Fanny Hill

1hr 27mins

Distributed by Brent Walker on VHS/Beta

"The Stud, The Bitch, Emanuelle... And now Fanny Hill" proclaims this cassette cover excitedly. A good example of a video promoter telling implicit lies to sell his product. Despite the fact that Fanny Hill was written over 200 years ago by John Cleland, we are led to believe that it has only recently been dreamed up by some Hollywood whizz-kid!

The truth is that unlike Sylvia Kristel and Joan Collins (though some may argue here) Fanny Hill is a historical figure, and this puts 'Fanny-the-movie' in a different category. For a start it is set in the 18th century which means that what would normally be pornography is, by the addition of a few carriages and crinolines, changed into a 'romp'.

This does not mean that the ladies aren't tanned in a way that was totally unfashionable for the time, or that sex scenes aren't filmed solely from the point of view of that third voyeuristic presence, the audience. But it does mean that we are invited to laugh uproariously while marvelling at the extent of the human sexual repertoire.

This peculiarly British jocular approach to sex is unfortunately mingled in this film with some rather earnest attempts at dramatic integrity (Oliver Reed is particularly terrible attempting a 'character' part) so that what emerges is a strange mixture of Dickensian Sunday TV serial and Electric Blue.

The film follows the adventures of Francis Hill ("but all who know me call me Fanny"), a young country lass who comes to London following the death of

### Q-The Winged Serpent HOK

1hr 32mins A terrifying horror tale in which New York police are called in to investigate a series of ritualistic murders, in the style of an ancient Aztec sacrifice to their God a flying serpent. Only one man knows the hiding place of the winged creature, and is prepared to trade the information for the right price. Starring Michael Moriarty, David Carradine, Candy Clark and Richard Roundtree. Directed by Larry Cohen.

### Beginner to Black Belt MAP

1983 An instructional cassette; part one of a series of four programmes which takes the beginner, in step by step stages, through the basic movements and then on to the more advanced techniques of Black Belt. Introduced by Michael Randall 5th Dan and Roger Ball 4th Dan.

### Racing into History MCR

1hr A collection of historic motor cycle races from 1958, 1959 and 1962 from Silverstone and Oulton Park. The riders include Geoff Duke, Mike Bailwood, John Surtees, Claude Lambert, Paddy Driver and Bill Lomas. Enthusiasts please note that the cassette contains the 1958

Sidecar and Senior TT Races.

### The Examination Game LET

(Spon) 1983 1hr An educational programme consisting of two 30min tapes. On Tape One, a detailed look is taken at the examination system to which all schools are geared, while Tape Two, *Studying For and Passing Exams* gives advice on revision, study techniques, examination preparation and techniques and the examination paper itself.

### Kitty and the Bagman IMO

1hr 42mins Two crime queens of the twenties, Kitty O'Rourke and Big Lil Delaney, take you back to the rip-roaring Australia after the First World War. Kitty, desperate for money to help her crooked husband, becomes the hostess of an illicit nightclub, frequented by Sydney's socialites. But Big Lil sees her as a rival and is out for revenge. Starring Liddy Clark, John Stanton and Val Lehman. Directed by Donald Crombie.

### Snatch IMO

1hr 30mins An Australian thriller about a dying criminal with only a few weeks to live who plans his last

and most ambitious heist as well as the way he wants to die. Starring John Flaus, Bryan Brown and Chrissie James.

### Stuckey's Last Stand IMO

1hr 30mins A crazy comedy about life in a summer camp, with fun and games galore as the camp counselors try to protect the great outdoors from their young charges. Starring Whitt Richard, Tom Murray and Rich Cosention.

### Reggae Sunsplash Part II VCL

1982 1hr The second half of the recording made at last years' Reggae Festival in Jamaica with more great artists as well as encores from some of those who appeared in Part One. The performers featured include Yellowman, Deniece Williams, Big Youth, Chalice, Byron Lee & the Dragonaires, Taj Mahal, Lloyd Parkes and We the People. Available in stereo.

### The Bells of Hell VCL

1hr 30mins An horrific but sad tale about a young man kept in a mental hospital for the last two years. Soon a court must decide if this arrange-

ment is to be permanent and, should this happen, the inheritance from his mother would be given to his aunt. This evil woman plots against the boy, and he is walled up in a church steeple with little hope of escape. Starring Renaud Verley, Viveca Lindfors and Alfredo Mayo. Directed by C.G. Hill.

### Psychomania VCL

(18) 1971 1hr 30mins A tale of the supernatural about a motorcycle gang who call themselves 'The Living Dead', their leader being the son of a medium, who possesses the secret of eternal life. The young man is killed in a crash and returns to life to share the secret of immortality with the members of his gang. Starring Beryl Reid, George Sanders and Nicky Henson. Directed by John Sharp.

### Fiona on Fire CMV

(18) 1hr 53mins A sexy adult thriller from America about a model who gets murdered whilst making love in the shower. The video follows a detective as he pieces her life together from her diary, which shows just how she managed to become a top model.